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(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau

(43) International Publication Date
22 November 2001 (22.11.2001)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 01/87486 A2

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: B01L 3/00

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US01/15823

(22) International Filing Date: 15 May 2001 (15.05.2001)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
60/204,265 15 May 2000 (15.05.2000) US

(63) Related by continuation (CON) or continuation-in-part (CIP) to earlier application:
US 60/204,265 (CON)
Filed on 15 May 2000 (15.05.2000)

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(81) Designated
BA, BB, B
ES, FI, GB
KE, KG, I
MG, MK,
SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, ..., ...
VN, YU, ZA, ZW.

AZ,
BB,
, JP,
MD,
, SD,
, UZ,

(84) Designated States *(regional)*: ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:
— *without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

WO 01/87486 A2

(54) Title: MICROFLUIDICS DEVICES AND METHODS FOR PERFORMING CELL BASED ASSAYS

(57) Abstract: This invention provides methods and apparatus for performing microanalytic analyses and procedures, particularly miniaturized cell based assays. These methods are useful for performing a variety of cell-based assays, including drug candidate screening, life sciences research, and clinical and molecular diagnostics.

MICROFLUIDICS DEVICES AND METHODS FOR PERFORMING CELL BASED ASSAYS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/204,264, filed May 15, 2000, the disclosure of which is explicitly incorporated by reference herein.

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to methods and apparatus for performing microanalytic analyses and procedures. In particular, the present invention provides devices and methods for the performance of miniaturized cell based assays. These assays may be performed for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to screening of drug candidate compounds, life sciences research, and clinical and molecular diagnostics.

2. Background of the Related Art

Recent developments in a variety of investigational and research fields have created a need for improved methods and apparatus for performing analytical, particularly bioanalytical assays at microscale (*i.e.*, in volumes of less than 100 μL). In the field of pharmaceuticals, an increasing number of potential drug candidates require assessment of their biological function. As an example, the field of combinatorial chemistry combines various structural sub-units with differing chemical affinities or configurations into molecules; in theory, a new molecule having potentially unique biochemical properties can be created for each permutation of the sub-units. In this way, large libraries of compounds may be synthesized from relatively small numbers of constituents, each such compound being a potential drug lead compound of usually unknown biological activity and potency. Similarly, increasingly large numbers of targets for these putative therapeutic compounds are being discovered, many as a result of the growing information derived from such large-scale biological research as the sequencing of the human genome.

As the first phase of drug discovery, compounds that represent potential drugs are screened against targets in a process known as High Throughput Screening (HTS) or ultra-High Throughput Screening (uHTS). An advantage of these screening